

*Dear NSTU siblings,*

*While we all hoped that 2021-2022 would see life settle into a post-pandemic normalcy that allowed our focus in the classroom to be wholly dedicated to teaching and learning, we once again begin a school year where COVID-19 has significant implications for students, staff and families.*

*Throughout the spring and summer, together we made it clear that preparing for a safe and sustainable year of in-person learning needed to happen with as much lead time as possible.*

*It's worth noting that this return to school season comes hot on the tail of a provincial election which resulted in a sea change in leadership and a new majority Progressive Conservative government.*

*After eight years of dealing with a government that dictated rather than collaborated as its go-to approach, incoming Premier Tim Houston and new Minister of Education Becky Druhan have already demonstrated that open communication and exchange will be key components of the relationship government fosters with teachers and their union.*

*Premier Houston, less than a week after his election victory, reached out to the NSTU to discuss the back-to-school plan prior to its release. Further, the Premier, Minister Druhan and Deputy Minister requested a tour of the NSTU building as a first-step towards creating a positive, collaborative relationship.*

*Obviously, concerns about back to school and other standing priorities remain for us. While we would have preferred to see a return-to-school plan that includes mandatory masking, proper ventilation in every classroom, and class size that supports full physical distancing, we now have an ability to dialogue with government we have not had in years.*

*I want every member to understand we are working diligently to realize changes and improvements that address your pandemic concerns, as well as identify steps that meaningfully address the working conditions and workload issues you raised loudly with the previous government.*

*I know you all want changes and protections in your classrooms and worksites now. I know that there is significant residual frustration and anger because of the way the previous government treated teachers, school counsellors and school-based specialists.*

*If we are going to realize improvements, it matters deeply how we interact with those who have just formed government.*

*It's for this reason I implore you to endeavour to build a lasting dialogue and relationship with your MLA. In the way that I and senior NSTU leadership have an opportunity to reset relationship with government, so do you.*

*Citizens whose conversations happen faithfully, whether things are good or in crisis, hold the greatest influence with their elected officials. Being able to relay concerns in respectful, clear terms while demonstrating esteem for the office an MLA holds is a key to unlocking influence and moving policy and legislation that works for Nova Scotians forward.*

*I know that in these early days of the school year you are dedicated to meeting and knowing your students and creating the togetherness and trust needed to navigate and overcome obstacles that inevitably arise throughout the school year. The foundations we build in these initial weeks serve to enhance or hinder the growth and success we can realize together.*

*We now have an opportunity to build relationship so our priorities for our working and learning conditions can be realized through dialogue and collaboration.*

*My promise to you is to build that relationship at the senior leadership level in a manner that maximizes our shared opportunity to realize positive change. My hope is that you will build a similar dynamic with your home and school MLA. Together, despite the challenges the pandemic continues to present, we have an ability to rebuild trust with government, heal recent harms and realize improvements we know benefit us, our students and communities.*

*I wish you all a wonderful beginning to this new school year, and to working in solidarity to change the channel and put quality public education front and centre in a truly just recovery.*

*All my best,*



*Paul*